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WHEN MOTHER LETS US TELL STORIES

ENOS B. COMSTOCK

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WHEN MOTHER LETS US TELL STORIES

By ENOS B. COMSTOCK
Author of "Tuck-Me-In Stories," etc.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

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FOREWORD

Almost everything we see—whether we are on our way to school, or playing in the yard, or looking out of the window on a rainy day—almost everything we see suggests some thought to us. Some of the thoughts are long ones and some are very short. Some of them are interesting and others are not. If what we see is very interesting, we run and tell Mother about it. We are telling a story. Mother will listen, and if what we say is clear, Mother will understand just what we have seen and she will be interested too.

Henry comes running in from the yard and says, "Mother! I saw a dog chasing a kitten." That is a very short story, but it is quite an interesting one. Mother is at once anxious to know whether it was our kitten and how the kitten got away.

Now the thing that we are going to learn to do —whether we are telling about something that really happened, or whether it is something that just make believe happened—is to tell it in such a way that it will be interesting.

I have often heard you say, "I like this story,"

or, "This is my favorite story." I wonder if you have ever stopped to think why you like some stories better than you do others. You say, "I like the story of Little Red Riding Hood." If I were to ask you why you liked Little Riding Hood, you would probably say, "I like it because it is exciting, and I like it because it has a nice ending." Those are very good reasons, and there are a great many other reasons why we may like one story or another. Now that we are going to make up stories of our own, we must begin to ask ourselves what it is in stories that makes us like them. This will help us to know what to put into our own stories if we want little brother to think they are interesting.

We all like pictures. We like them because they tell us stories. Pictures tell stories more simply than nature does, because they can leave out the things that are not important. For this reason we are going to use pictures to help in teaching us to tell stories. Then, after we have learned to tell interesting stories with the help of pictures, perhaps we will be able to make up stories without that help.

THE USE OF STORY PICTURES

Since the very beginning of time, little children have loved to listen to stories. Ages and ages ago when the savage cave man brought home a tiny bear cub and gave it to his shaggy-headed children for a plaything, I haven't a doubt but that they wanted to know where he found the furry little creature and how he managed to catch it. In other words, they wanted him to tell them a story about it.

Now, because all little children, and big ones too, like to hear stories, it is only natural that sooner or later they will want to try to tell them. When mother tucks baby into his carriage and goes out for a walk, you, sister, will do the same with your doll. And, after brother has watched the gardener setting out plants, he will want to make a garden too. So—when you and brother go to mother and ask her to tell you a story, just when she is most busy with her morning's work, she may say, "I am very busy just now, dear. Why don't you tell brother a story?" And why don't you? The idea is a very good one, and you are anxious to begin. But perhaps the first

thought that comes to you will be, "I don't know what to tell a story about." This is not because you cannot think of anything. It is more likely to be because there are so very many things you can think of that you don't know which to choose.

After you have made up your mind what your story is to be about, or, "chosen your subject," as we say, you will find it hard to decide on the best way to begin and how to have things follow each other in the most interesting way. This, again, is not because you are at a loss for something to say, but because you think of so many things all at once you cannot decide on what to tell and what to leave out. You remember the day you went for that beautiful ride in the country. There were so many interesting roads and Daddy said, "We can travel over just one road at a time. They are all inviting but we will have to save the others for other trips." It is just so with telling a story. If your story is to be interesting, you must not try to travel over different roads at the same time.

Long, long ago, before people were civilized enough to have a written language, they used pictures as a means of telling, or recording, what had happened during their lives, so that those who were to come into the world after they had gone might know something of its history. They

had a message to give to people whom they could not reach with their voices and they chose the very simplest way of expressing their messages, and that way was by the use of pictures. If a man killed a lion and he wanted people to know about it, he made a picture showing just how it was done. He had no pencil or paper, so he had to carve his picture in stone or scratch it on a piece of wood. And, just as it was easier for people to tell stories with pictures instead of written words, so too was it easier to understand stories told in pictures. Of course we have been to school and we know how to read written words, but we don't always want to read stories that other people have written. We want to make up our stories. We will need a little help to begin with, and we are going to use pictures to help us. We have just learned that that is the simplest kind of help in story telling, and probably it will not be long until we will be able to get along without any help.

When I tell you that it is easier to tell a story with the help of several pictures than it is to tell one about a single picture, your first thought may be, "I should think it would be easier to tell a story about just one picture." Several pictures, if the thought in each is clear, will lead us along step by step, from the beginning to the very end

of a story, and will keep us from going astray. That is what is called keeping the "succession of events." "Succession of events" sounds like something very hard to understand, but it means simply having the different parts of a story follow each other in the right order.

A single picture may give us a thought on which to build a story, but it is not at all likely to help us all the way through with it. Perhaps with the help of some very simple pictures I can show you more clearly what I mean. Let us follow these pictures and see how they lead us along from the beginning to the end of a little story.

The first picture says, "Mrs. Duck has a nest in an old box." Turn to the next page.

"There are eight eggs in the nest."

Now turn to the third page.

"The eggs have hatched."

And the fourth picture says:

"Mrs. Duck is taking her family down to the pond for their first swim."

Of course we might add more to what each picture says to make our story longer and more interesting, but you see how the pictures help to keep us to the main points as we go along. If you were going to lengthen your story you would probably say: "Mrs. Duck has a nest in an old box. She has been sitting very still for a long time." Then you would turn to the next page and say: "She got off from the nest for a few minutes to rest and get something to eat, and while she was away I counted the eggs. There were eight of them." You might look at the third page and say: "She did not stay off the nest very long as she knew that it would not do to allow the eggs to get cold. A short time after she returned, the eggs began to hatch and soon there were eight downy little ducklings scrambling to get out into the warm sunlight." And the last picture would say: "It was a beautiful day, and the ducklings were all very anxious for a swim, so Mrs. Duck took them down to the pond. She was very happy." You see you have told about the same story only you have made it a little longer and a little more interesting, but in both cases the pictures served as your guide.

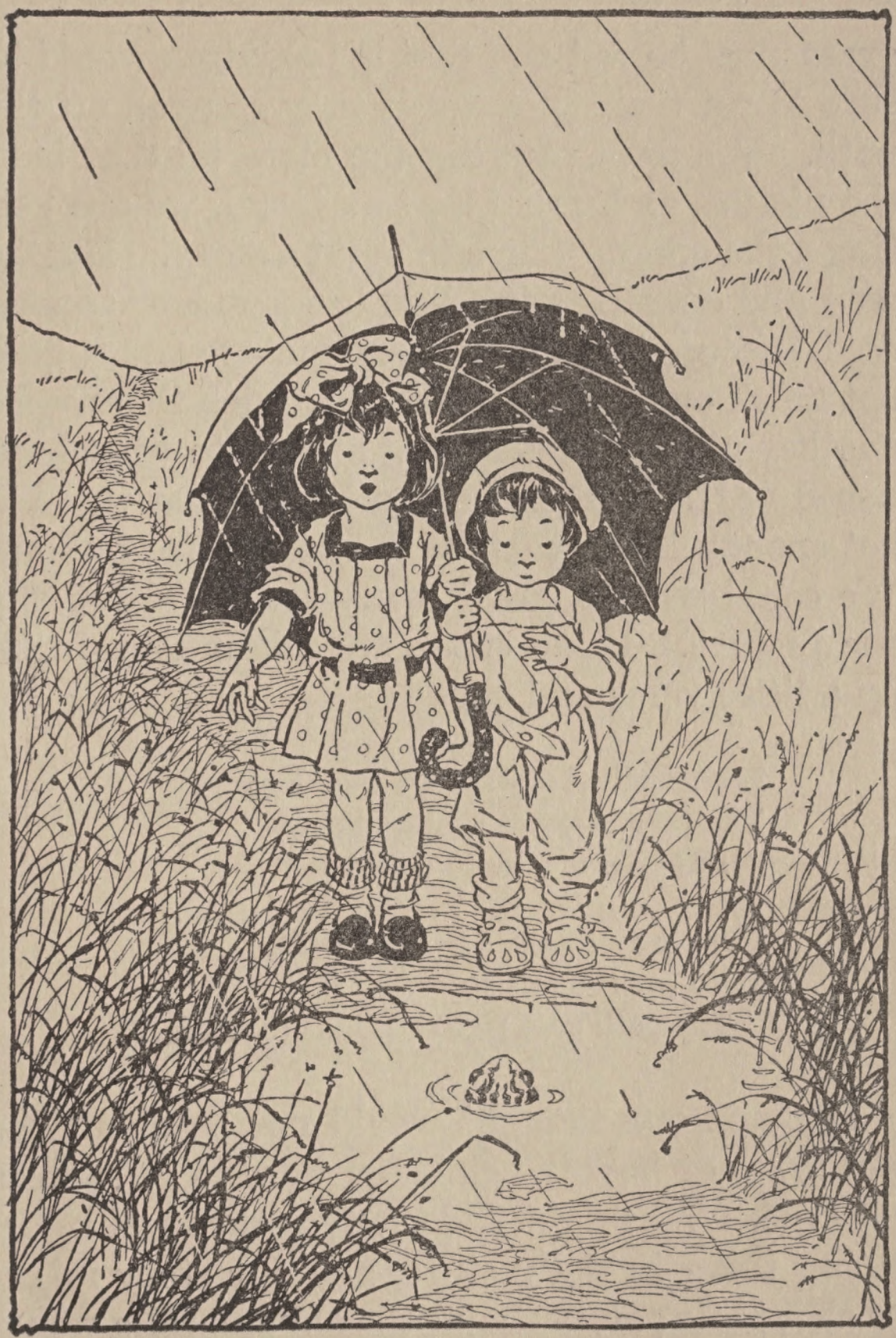
Have you ever seen a carpenter building a house? He has a set of pictures to guide him too. His pictures are called plans, and they show him

just how each part is to be built as he goes along. His pictures show him how the house is to be built, and the pictures I have drawn are intended to show you how you are to build your stories.

Now suppose we try to tell a story with only a single picture to help us. Here is a picture of two little children standing under an umbrella in the rain. Directly in the path before them is a pool of water. A large frog is eyeing them from the middle of the pool. What thought does this picture suggest to you?

Try to remember that simply telling what you see in a picture is not making up a story about the picture. When you merely name the different objects you see in a picture, you are using your eyes but you are not using your imagination. Let the picture furnish you with a thought and then take that thought and try to tell it in a way that will be interesting.

Suppose we study the picture before us. We will observe that the grass on either side of the path is tall. We will notice too that the water covers the path so that it would be necessary for the children to walk into the grass in order to get around the pool. We know that it is raining—we can see the drops falling from the umbrella and splashing in the pool—now we know that the



grass must be wet and that the children would be sure to get their feet wet if they stepped off the path. We are gathering the material that is in the picture and, from that material, we are getting a thought on which to build a story. But we may find ourselves at a loss to know how to proceed, because there is only one picture and it does not finish our story for us. We wish there were another picture to give us a hint as to what happened next. I do not mean to say that there is not enough in the picture to write a story about. We could write a great many stories about this one picture. If we chose, we might even make up a little verse and say—

We promised mother we would go
The very shortest way we know,
  But how are we to do it?

Here is a puddle, deep and wide,
With grasses tall on either side—
  The path goes right straight through it.

Perhaps our thought would not be about the wet grass or how the children were to get across the pool. We might find the frog the most interesting thing in the picture, and our story might be about him; or, perhaps, the old umbrella would interest us most. But, in any case, we would

have to use quite a good deal of our own imagination in order to make the story interesting and bring it to a successful ending. Now I think we will all agree that it is harder to tell a story about a single picture than it is to follow a set of pictures. It isn't that the picture does not give us a thought, but it is apt to give us too many thoughts and not finish any of them.

What I have just said recalls a story I heard when I was a little boy. It must have been an interesting story or I would probably have forgotten it long ago. Any way it may help to make clearer what I have said about the same thing, whether that thing is some object, or a picture; suggesting entirely different thoughts to different people.

The story was about four blind men who went to "see" an elephant. Of course they could not really see, so they had to feel the elephant with their hands. The first man happened to feel one of the elephant's legs. The second ran his hand along the elephant's side. The third took hold of his tail, and the fourth touched one of his tusks. Then, when each was pretty sure he knew just what the elephant looked like, they sat down to have a little talk about him. "The elephant is very much like a tree," said the first man. "No," said the second, "I think he is much more

like the side of a house." "How stupid," said the third; "I felt of the elephant very carefully and he is like a piece of rope." "You are all wrong," said the fourth man, who had felt of the animal's tusk; "the elephant is like a bar of metal."

So they argued and argued, and it was a long time before they discovered that they were all partly wrong and all partly right.

This happened to be a story about some blind men and an elephant, but such things are just as likely to occur when there are twenty pairs of bright little eyes all looking at the very same thing, and the brighter they are the more different things they are likely to see. It would be a very stupid world if everything told the same story to all of us.

WHEN AND WHERE TO TELL STORIES

One of the nicest things about telling stories is that you don't need anything besides interesting thoughts, and the power to tell your thoughts in an interesting way. I mean, you don't need lumber or tools or a drawing board or anything that you can't take with you wherever you choose to go. There is no disorder that must be kept in any particular spot.

When you have finished helping mother with her work, or, when she says, "I wish you would do something to amuse little brother"—when you are tired of running and romping, and feel like sitting down with your playmates—in the winter twilight, when you are sitting before the open fire—when you are kept in the house on rainy days, and brother or sister become restless and tired of their play, these are good times to pick out a quiet nook and gather your little listeners about you. You can find a peaceful spot almost anywhere. In winter, or on rainy days it may be the window seat, or the big rocker, or the rug. In the spring, summer and autumn, you have the whole beautiful outdoor world. The hammock on the veranda—the seat under the old apple tree—the soft grassy fields—the

shady lawn—the flat stump at the edge of the woods—the great rocks at the sea shore—the bench in the park—the walk home from school. All these, and a thousand other places, will inspire your imagination and make you want to tell stories. You will never have trouble finding eager little listeners, if you make your stories fresh and interesting.

SUSPENSE

Now that you are about to begin to tell stories to interest other people, you must remember that your position is very different from what it was when you were listening to stories that were read or told to you.

When you are listening to a story and it begins to get exciting, how anxious you are to know just what is going to happen next. You can hardly wait. When Mother closes the book and says, "Now we won't read any more to-night," you say, "Oh, Mother! won't you please read us just one more page. This is such an exciting place to stop. I am so anxious to know how it ends."

You wonder why the author keeps from telling you the very things you are most anxious to know. You wish he would hurry and tell how Bluebeard's wife was saved, or, whether or not, Jack escaped from the giant. That is what we call, "being kept in suspense" and, you may not know it, but it is the very thing that makes the story exciting.

The author, or story-teller, knows how to keep you interested until the very end. Now that *you* are to be the story-teller, *you* must make a study

of finding out different ways of keeping up the suspense and interest of *your* listeners.

You remember, in the story of Cinderella, what a hard time the prince had finding out who the crystal slipper belonged to—and how it was not until the very end of the story that he really knew that Cinderella was the only person in all the land who could get her dainty foot into the slipper perfectly. You hoped he would find it out, and perhaps you were almost sure that he would, but just the same, you were quite impatient while the ugly sisters each tried their best to force their foot into the slipper. You wished you could tell the prince to let Cinderella try it.

Perhaps you have made up your mind that, when you tell stories, you are going to let your listeners know the exciting things as quickly as possible and not keep them in suspense. Perhaps you think that you do not like to be kept in suspense and, now that you are the story teller, you are not going to keep other people guessing as to what is going to happen next—but, if you will think over the stories you have read and listened to, I am pretty sure you will discover that the very ones you liked the best were those that kept you in doubt every minute, as to what would happen.

I know a little boy who almost always tells the

most interesting part of what he has to say first, and then goes back and relates all the less interesting things that lead up to it. This shows two things very clearly. First, it shows that he must know what the most interesting part of his story is. Second, it shows that he does not know how to keep his listeners interested to the end. He is so impatient to tell what he has to say, that he does not stop to think that there is a best way to tell it.

If this same little boy had his way, I am afraid he would come to the table and have his dessert first, because he likes it best, and then finish his meal with his meat and potatoes and bread and butter and milk. The dessert is good. We may like it better than we do the meat and potatoes, but each course must come in its proper place. It is just so with the parts of a story. We might call them the different courses. They must be good and interesting, and they should lead up to something even more interesting.

GATHERING MATERIAL

We are going to talk about plots and style and originality later on, but I must be careful not to hurry these subjects in a way that will be confusing. So, before we take them up, I think it will be refreshing to look at a set of pictures, have a little talk about them, and then see what success you have telling your first story.

You have learned that the pictures are intended to supply you with material for your story. Now you are about to gather that material—just as you would gather berries for a shortcake.

There are two ways you might go about it.

One way would be to turn to the first picture, study it carefully—then, when you are sure you have not overlooked anything, begin your story, telling every thought that the picture supplies. Then turn to the next picture and do the same—and so on to the end.

The other way—and by far the better way, would be to look at the first picture just long enough to get the main idea—then turn to the second picture and see what happens next, or, what the new developments are—and so on, to the end of the series. Then, knowing what the story is about, or, what the plot of the story is,

and how it begins and ends—you are ready to turn back to the first picture and study it more carefully.

It will now be easy to understand why the things of less importance are there, and what bearing they have on the story.

You will find that you have a better understanding of the picture than you had at first, and you are ready to begin telling your story.

Be careful not to run ahead of the picture that is before you, or to tell anything before it occurs.

If you were looking at the pictures purely for your own amusement. you would probably want to be surprised by each picture as you came to it. You would not care to know the ending until you had studied and enjoyed each picture in turn. But you are doing something more than that now. You are telling stories to interest others, and you want your story to progress smoothly and in the most interesting way.

The plan I have just described, of getting a general idea and then going back and building it up, or, developing it, is exactly what you do, too, when you draw a picture. You do not start in with a hard pencil line, finishing up each part as you go along. You begin by making a rough sketch of the whole picture, and then go back

and develop the details, carrying them all along together.

Here is a little story of adventure, told in six pictures.

Suppose you look at each picture in turn, as I suggested, just carefully enough to fix the plot in your mind. Then turn back to the first picture, study the detail, and begin to tell your story.

I am going to let you make up your story in your own way, because I feel sure you want to do that. You won't mind though, if I make just a few suggestions under each picture, to remind you not to overlook little things.

I am going to ask you not to read what is printed under the pictures until you go over them the second time.

Now look at the pictures.

What season of the year do you think it is?
What kind of a day is it?
Why do the ducks like this particular spot?
Who discovered the ducks first?

What does the dog think of this part of the picnic?

How do the ducks feel about it?

Is there anything in the picture that leads you to think that the children have planned to spend the whole day at the river?

Notice that the ducks are still lingering in the distance.

Perhaps they are hoping that the children may come to grief.

What effect does the weight of the children and the dog have upon the bridge?

Are the children thinking of anything besides the fish?

What do you see that the children do not see?

How do you know that the fish is pulling hard?

Do not forget that the ducks may still be in the story, even though the picture does not show them.

What do you think they did when the plank broke?

Remember, it is not necessary to end your story with the last picture.

It might be interesting to see if you could give it a happier ending by adding more.

What became of the fish-pole and the fish?

PLOTS

How often you have said, "I like this story," or, "This is my favorite story." I wonder if you have ever stopped to think why you like some stories better than you do others. You used to say, "I like the story of 'Little Red Riding Hood.'" If I had asked you why you liked it, you would probably have said, "I like it because it is exciting, and I like the way it ends."

Now that you are the story teller, you must ask yourself why it is that you like some stories better than you do others. This will help you to know what to put into your own stories, if you want brother and sister to like them.

The relation of the different parts of the story to each other, and all leading toward an end, or climax, is what is called the plot. You may call it the plan, for the present, if that seems easier to understand.

When you plan a picnic, you decide on some place to go. Perhaps it is the shady woods on the bank of the river. You may enjoy every minute of the preparation, and the walk to the spot where the picnic is to be. You may gather flowers, and chase butterflies, along the way, and have a lovely time—but the picnic ground on the

river bank is what you are looking forward to, and the other things simply lead up to it. It is just so with your story. You may have many little things happen, to keep your listeners interested, but use these things to lead them on and build up something of greater interest, that is to happen farther along in your story.

Would it help you here to see another set of pictures. You may tell your own story about them, of course; and tell it in your own way. Then I will use the pictures to help you to understand a little talk about plots. Just as I used the last set to explain what I said about gathering material.

Remember that what is printed under the pictures has nothing to do with your telling your story. It is simply a part of our talk about plots.

Pretend that you thought up the whole story yourself. If you had, I think you would have thought of the last picture first. That was what I did.

Perhaps an organ grinder came down your street, and you watched the little monkey do his tricks. Maybe he tried to turn the crank of the organ. Then the thought came to you, "What fun it would be to make up a story about a monkey playing an organ for a lot of other little animals to dance."

That was the idea that came to you first, and then you began to figure out a plan, or plot, that would make their little dance seem reasonable.

Then you put your mind to thinking up a way of beginning your story.

"I can have a little monkey, walking along the road with his master. But, how can I explain his getting the organ, and his escape?"

"I know! I will pretend the man is very tired, and then I will have him sit down to rest and fall asleep."

You are beginning to build your plot. But there ought to be some good reason for the monkey's playing such a trick on his master. Perhaps he wanted to be carried, and was out of humor because his master made him walk.

"Yes, that would be a good reason for his playing a prank."

You have thought out what he did, and how he was able to do it, and why he did it.

The rest of your plan is easy.

Of course he ran for the nearest woods.

When he was sure that he was out of his master's reach, he called the little squirrels, and rabbits, and chipmunks, about him—explained his plan, and invited them to dance.

You have finally gotten back to your dance, which was the very first idea that came to you.

You have thought out your plot and made it seem possible and reasonable.

In other words, you have planned your whole story.

All that remains to be done is to tell your story in the most interesting way possible, keeping in mind the things we talked about in our chapter called "Suspense."

There is so much that might be said on the subject of plots, that it is hard to know just what to say and what to leave out.

You may be able to talk in a most interesting way. You may know all the rules of composition; but the real success of your story depends most on whether your plot is interesting.

Your knowledge of language and composition, or the construction of sentences, is your tool. Your thoughts are your material, and your plot is the thing that you build.

I am sure you can see the reason for having a good and well formed idea before you begin your story. Just as, with your tools and lumber, you would have to know, before beginning, whether you were going to build a boat, or a doll house.

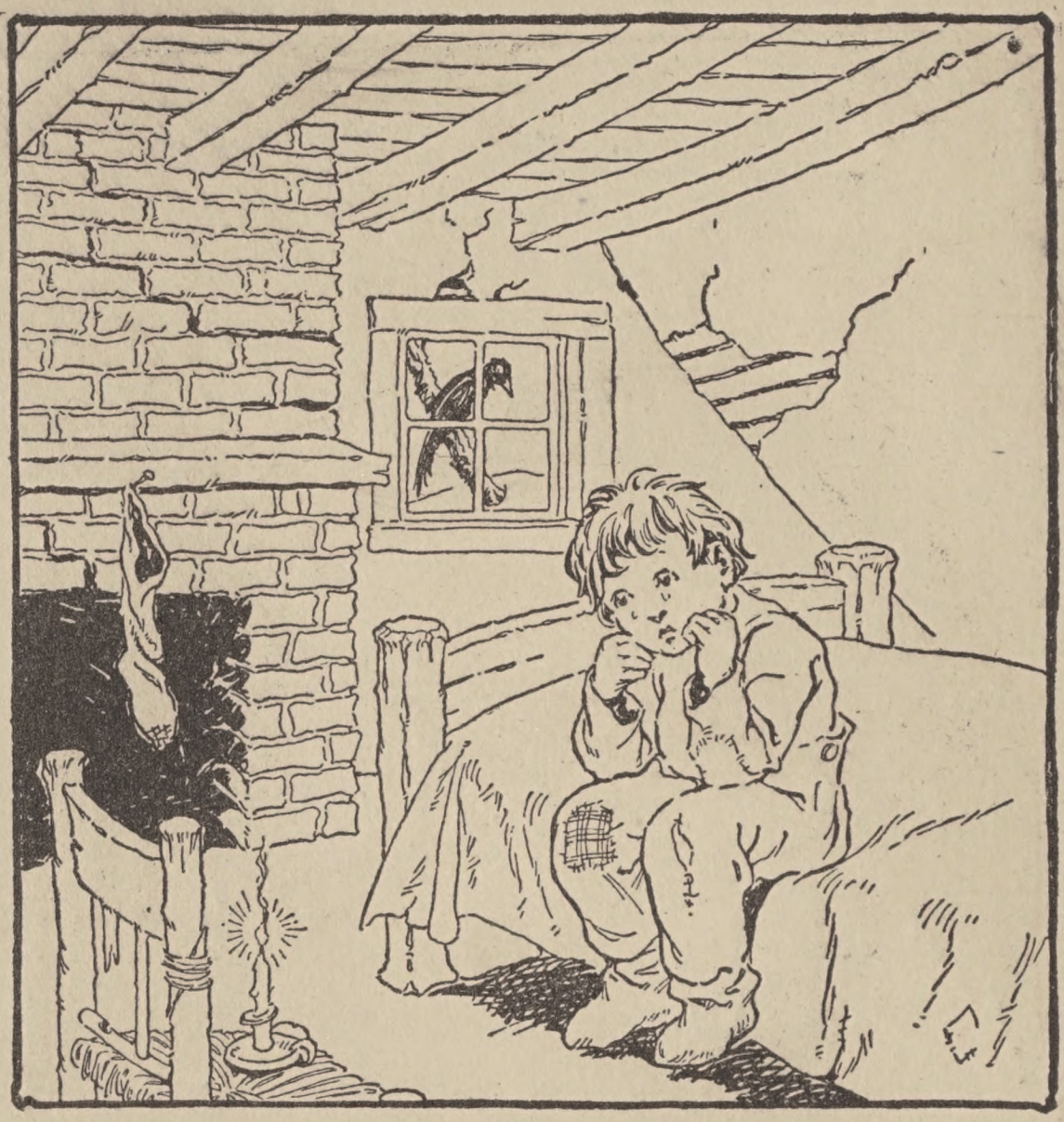
You know, from the number of stories you have read and listened to, how very many plots there must be. Perhaps you say, "Why yes, every story has a different plot." That is true, and still it would be possible to class all of these plots under a few general headings. I think you will be surprised to know how much alike the plots sometimes are, in what we think are very different stories. Is that a little hard to understand? Perhaps I can make it clearer this way. Two of my favorite stories—and I

am pretty sure they are favorites of yours too, are—Cinderella, and Hans Christian Andersen's story of "The Ugly Duckling." "How queer that we should like such very different stories," you say, "One is about a little girl, and the other is about a little duckling that turned out to be a swan."

Suppose we pick the stories to pieces and compare them. "Cinderella" is a story about a poor little girl who was treated very unkindly by her step-mother and her sisters. But, one day, through the help of a fairy god-mother, she was given a chance to go to a ball at the king's palace, where the prince met her. He saw how beautiful she was; and, in the end, he married her and she became a lovely princess.

Now let us take the case of the "Ugly Duckling." He was a poor little baby fowl that was treated very unkindly by his step-mother and brothers and sisters. They drove him out into the world. There was no fairy god-mother to help him, but finally, after many hardships, he came, not to a palace, but to what seemed like a palace to him—a lovely lake. And there he met some beautiful swans—just as Cinderella met the beautiful prince, at the palace. In the end, he turned out to be a lovely swan—just as Cinderella became a lovely princess.

This will be a good place for us to see the story pictures of "Little Alfred's Christmas," because, while the likeness is not as great as in the two we have just compared, this plot would still be classed under the same head.



I will not spoil your chance to tell the story by telling it for you.

All that I am going to do is to point out in what way the plot is similar to "Cinderella," and "The Ugly Duckling," and why it would be put under the same class.

It is a story about a poor little boy.

Then, right at the beginning, we see that they are alike in one respect. They are all stories about poor little folks.

In the story of "Little Alfred's Christmas," the old black crow comes and sees how unhappy he is. Just as in "Cinderella," the fairy godmother saw how unhappy Cinderella was. And, just as the fairy god-mother set out to make Cinderella happy, so does the old black crow plan to make little Alfred happy.

He knows that what the little boy is longing for, is a merry Christmas, and he does everything he can think of to bring it about.

In the end, Alfred is made very happy, when he finds that his wish has come true.

The fairy god-mother knew that Cinderella was very anxious to go to the ball and meet all the lovely people. So she did everything she could to bring *it* about.

In the end, Cinderella was made very happy by having her wish granted.

You see, in a general way, these plots are all rather alike.

There are a great many more that would be classed under the same head.

You would have to include "Little Lord Fauntleroy too.

If you were to describe, in a very general way, the plots that belong in this class, you would say, "All plots that are about some poor person, or creature, who has a very hard time of it in the beginning of the story, and finally, because he is good and worthy, he receives his reward, and the story ends happily.

Then there is another division that would include stories that are the direct opposite of those we have just been talking about.

In the plots of this class, there is usually some cruel person, or monster, who has all of the people terrorized. He practices his wicked ways until the end of the story, when he comes to grief.

"Jack the Giant Killer" and "Bluebeard" and a number of the stories in the "The Arabian Nights" would be classed among these.

Some of the best stories of adventure are not so dependent on their plot, for interest, as on the many little happenings that hold the listener's attention. "Alice in Wonderland" is a good example of this kind of a story.

You boys especially, are very fond of the story of "Robinson Crusoe." You like the account of the wreck, and it thrills you to think that this lone man should have escaped drowning. The author wished to write a story of the adventures of a man alone on an island and he took that interesting way of bringing about the situation he wanted. The same plot, or plan, has been used over and over again, in stories that are not at all alike in other respects. Tennyson used it in his beautiful poem, "Enoch Arden." It was used in "The Swiss Family Robinson." Charles Reid used it in his novel, "Foul Play," and Rob-

ert Louis Stevenson has an old character marooned on the island, in "Treasure Island."

We might go on and on with our talk about plots. It is such an interesting subject. The point I have tried most to bring out is that, while you want your plots to be as original as possible, you need not be afraid to apply the inventions of other minds, to your own use. But try to use them in a new way.

You would be a genius indeed, if you could create a story that was in no way like anything that had ever been told. When an inventor is working at a machine, and he wants a wheel or a lever, he does not say, "Oh no, I must not use these things, I did not invent them." He uses the things that have been invented, to help him to make some newer invention. You have the right to do the same with your story plots.

EYES AND EARS

You have learned how to use the material and the thought in the pictures and put it into your story. When you have finished with the pictures, and no longer have them to supply you with material, you may be at a loss to know just how to begin to build. I would be leaving out a very important chapter, if I were to try to tell you how to begin, without first saying something about what you must do before you can hope to make up interesting stories. You must learn to observe. Observe is not a hard word to understand. It means, to give attention to what you see and hear. Or, in other words, to notice carefully.

Perhaps you think, "I am to be the story-teller, why should I be the one that is to listen or to be shown." You *are* the story-teller, and that is the very reason why you should see and hear. Not at the minute you are telling your story, but before you even think of beginning it.

Have you ever been to the country when they were making cider? Those of you who have never had a chance to see that, I am sure, have often watched mother baking a cake. That will do just as well, to show you what I mean. We

will pretend that the cider or cake is the story we are telling. We know, that in order to get cider out of the press, or cake out of the oven, we must first put something into the press, or into the oven. We know, too, that if we want to get fine rich cider, or a very good cake, we must put good sweet apples into the press, and fine sifted flour and good butter and eggs into the cake pan, before putting it into the oven.

It is exactly the same with your story. If you want the story to be good, you must have something interesting to talk about.

Your brain is like the cider press. It must be fed with something that it can make into an interesting story. And how is it to be fed? You must train your eyes and ears and sense of touch and taste and smell, to feed it. You must train these senses not only when you are telling your story, but all the time and everywhere. You cannot expect ever to give out anything more interesting than the thoughts you take in.

We sometimes hear people say, children and grownup people as well, "I am not original. I have no imagination." They mean that they are not good at thinking up new things. Of course some people have more new ideas than others, but they get them by using their eyes and ears and other senses. I am sure that we could all

think up new and interesting thoughts if we would learn to make better use of our senses.

I remember a story in an old school reader.

It was about two boys who had to travel over the same road and across the same fields in their walk to and from school. One day their teacher asked them to write a little story about what they

had seen on their way home from school. Your teacher has probably asked you to do that too, hasn't she? Well, one of the boys could not remember having seen anything that was at all interesting. It had been a long, tiresome walk. The road was dusty and it was a very hot day, but, aside from that, he remembered nothing.

The other boy had had a most interesting time on his way home. First he found some nice ripe blackberries in a thicket beside the road. Then he saw a strange looking bird, and he followed it, because it seemed to have a broken wing. The bird led him quite a long way away from his path, and he kept seeing new things that interested him. When he finally did get home, he had so many new thoughts, and he was so hungry, that he forgot all about how hot and tired he was. The title of the story was, "Eyes and Ears." It was written to show how people might travel over the same road, and one might see things, while the other would not. This is just as true of grown up people as it is of children. But you may be sure that the boys and girls who learn to use their eyes and ears when they are young, will use them when they are grown up. I once traveled through some of the most beautiful scenery in the Rocky Mountains, when it seemed as if every minute brought some-

thing more wonderful than the last. There were men, in the car I was in, who sat and played cards every bit of the way. The beautiful scen-

ery meant nothing to them, and I am afraid it was because they had not learned to use their eyes when they were young.

So, *please* do not say, "I am afraid I will

never be able to tell an interesting story, because I have no imagination." Learn to feed your imagination through your eyes and ears.

Authors and grown up story-tellers do all sorts of things to give themselves new thoughts to write about. They travel all over the world, gathering their material. Some of them risk their lives in very dangerous places. They do it because they know that, if they want their stories to be exciting they must have exciting, or thrilling material, to use in their stories.

One author, who wrote stories of adventure, built a small sail-boat. He did the work with his own hands. He did it because he knew that that in itself would be interesting to write about. When it was finished, he sailed all over the world in it. He might have sailed around the world on a big steamboat, with a thousand other passengers. He would probably have been a great deal more comfortable, but he was not looking for comfort. He wanted to have adventures of his own. He wanted all sorts of unexpected things to happen to him, because he knew it would be interesting material for his stories.

A few days ago I went over to the great Bronx zoo. I go there often, to study the animals and to get to know them better. There were hun-

dreds of boys and girls there. They were reading and listening to stories. And who do you think the story tellers were? They were the

animals and birds and reptiles. They had the most interesting things to tell the children, about themselves, and the children were listening with

all their ears and seeing with all their eyes. They were feeding their minds, or gathering material.

You do not give the shaggy old grizzly bear a peanut because you think he is hungry. Nor do you give it to him because you are anxious to get rid of the peanut. Your real reason for giving it to him, is to get him to tell you a story. Not in words of course, but in what he does. *You* are quite able to put it into words yourself. All you want him to do is to furnish you with an idea. He may open his great jaws and catch the peanut in them before it strikes the floor of his cage. Perhaps you don't throw it quite far enough and it strikes just outside of the bars. How interested you are watching him. First he tries to poke his nose through the bars and reach it with his tongue. Then, when he sees that he cannot do that, he puts his great paw through. He can just touch it with the tip of his claw, but each time it slips. At last he manages to reach just a little bit farther and draws it toward him. Then he nods his head in a very satisfied way. "Surely," you think, "he cannot have wanted one little peanut bad enough to have gone to all that work. He must have done it to please me and to show me that he was grateful."

There are almost always crowds of boys and

girls at the monkey cages. It is partly because they never know what the monkeys may do next. They are always doing some unexpected thing,

and an unexpected thing gives you a new thought.

An old chimpanzee sat for a long time nibbling at an apple. He turned it just as you or I would,

every time he took a fresh bite. After he had finished his apple, he gathered an armful of hay and climbed up onto a sort of shelf that had been put there for him to sleep on. He folded the hay up into a neat little roll and carefully placed it under his head for a pillow. Then he pretended to be taking a nap. I am sure that every boy and girl who saw that could tell a very interesting story about it.

Of course you do not all live where it is possible to visit a zoo. But that is just one of a thousand places quite as interesting, and just as full of thoughts. Learn to look for interesting things and you will find them everywhere. Perhaps you live in the country, and perhaps you say, "I am tired of the things here." "I love to go to the city and see new things." Of course you do, just as the city child loves to go to the country to see the things there that are new to him.

When Mary goes to visit her cousin in the city, she will see many wonderful things that are new to her. And, because they *are* new to her, they will seem a great deal more wonderful than the things at home in the country. But, if she has learned to use her eyes and ears, she will be able to tell her cousin stories about the swallows that build their nests high up among the beams in the

barn. The wonderful place in the hay mow, where she found the six baby kittens. She will tell about the calves and the baby pigs and about

her pet lamb, and countless other things. She may be surprised to see how much more interested her cousin is in her stories of the country, than she is in the city things about her.

When cousin Alice returns Mary's visit, she will tell the little country cousins about the crowded streets. How the big policeman, at the corner, holds up his hand and the great line of automobiles and teams stop, while he leads the boys and girls safely across the street. She will tell about the wonderful shop windows and the great stores, eight and ten stories high, full of toys, and everything else under the sun. These stories will be very interesting to the little country children, who know the woods and fields and shady roads so well, but who have seen so little of paved streets lined with great buildings that seem to touch the sky. But, whether you are in the city, or in the country or in the Great North Woods, or in a little mining town, way up on the side of a mountain—wherever you are, you may be sure that there are interesting things going on all about you. Learn to interest yourself in things.

You, little country boy and girl, if you love animals, and like to tell stories about them, go down through the pasture and hide back of the wall that fences off the clover field. There you can watch the old woodchuck. You will have to be very quiet, for he is on the lookout and if he hears you, he will drop down into his hole and will not show himself again for a long time.

But, if you are very still, you will probably find him, munching clover, a few feet away from the door of his home. He will stop every minute or

two and raise up on his haunches and look all about, to make sure that he is quite safe, for he knows that he has a great many enemies.

You may see him scratch the dirt away so as

to enlarge the entrance to his home. He may decide that it would improve his place to have a new doorway. Perhaps he thinks it would be safer, in case old Rover surprised him some day, when he happened to be a little too far away from the other hole. You will be surprised to see how very fast he can dig, with no tools other than his little fore paws. My, how he does make the dirt fly. But, he never forgets to stop every few moments to straighten up and look all around for any possible danger.

Perhaps you are disappointed the day you go to see old Mr. Woodchuck, and do not find him at home, but you may meet Mr. Gray Squirrel in the pasture. He will scamper up the nearest tree, and you will see him looking down at you from high up on a branch. He may be storing away his supply of nuts for the winter, and, what an interesting story that would make. Do not be satisfied with a hasty visit. Stay and watch him carefully and I think you will feel well repaid.

You may see a calf in the lane, or in the barnyard, on the way back to the house. You have seen hundreds of calves, but that is no reason why he should not be given a little thought. He turns and looks at you with his great wondering eyes. You remember, way back, when we were

talking about the use of pictures, I said that merely telling what was in the picture, was not telling a story about it. The same thing holds

true now that you are telling your stories about things other than pictures. Of course it would not be interesting just to give a description of a calf, but I don't see how you can look at him

without his suggesting some funny thought to you. His knees are so big, and he looks so awkward, and so innocent. I remember visiting on a farm, when I was a little boy. My little farm cousin was younger than I, but he knew all the farm animals and had no fear of them. He wanted me to see his pet calf but the calf behaved very badly, so my little cousin caught him by the tail to make him stand still. The calf, instead of standing, began to run and jump, and was soon going so fast that the little boy was afraid to let go for fear he would fall, and he felt almost certain that something would happen if he didn't let go. There happened to be a mud puddle in the barn-yard and the calf ran straight through the middle of it. I don't know whether the little bare-foot boy decided that it would be a good place to fall, because it was soft, or whether he just simply couldn't keep his feet any longer, but he let go just in time to fall in the very middle of the puddle. The calf ran a few steps beyond, and then turned around and looked at him, much as to say, "Well, you did get the worst of it, didn't you?"

Of course I thought it was very funny, but I was just a little boy when it happened, and it did not occur to me then, that there was material for a very funny story in what I had seen.

A few years ago one of our well known artists, who has painted a great many pictures of farm life, made a set of story pictures. His subject

was, "The Bull Calf," and he told a story in pictures, very like the one I have just told you. His story was about a man, and, instead of his having hold of the calf's tail, he was leading him

by a rope, and had carelessly tied the rope around his waist. The calf dragged him over all sorts of places, and finally jumped through a picket fence, where a board had been broken out. The man could not get through the opening, and was held there until some boys came along and cut the rope.

I have told you this little story because I thought it showed clearly how I might have used the very thing I really saw, as material for a story.

If you are fond of fairy tales, you will not need any hints from me as to where to look for ideas. Boys and girls who like fairy stories are pretty sure to have enough imagination to know the kind of places fairies would be likely to choose. Down in the tall grass, where the spider spins his web. Among the hollyhock stocks and blossoms. Where the flowers in the garden have crept over the edge of their beds and grown wild and in disorder. The bees and butterflies and dragonflies will lead you to the very places that fairies would be sure to like. The cool shady places among the pumpkin and squash vines. Did you ever peer down under the great spreading leaves and see the tall straight stems that support them like a canopy? The sun's rays, striking the green leaves and sifting through in

places, give wonderful unreal tone to the place. There is just one thing that this would make you think of, and that is "Fairy Land." It looks like such a wonderful place to play. Like a little world that was made for some very tiny people. You wish you could get down and creep in and out among the green columns, with the beetles and ants and lady bugs and caterpillars. They seem to be having such a good time. You envy the big bumble bee that disappears in one of the great yellow pumpkin blossoms, and comes out a few moments later, covered with dusty gold.

But, because you cannot get into this delightful fairy land yourself, that is no reason why you should not let your imagination wander in. You can people it with fairies, and they can dance about, in and out among the tall stocks, that must seem like trees to them. You can have them do all the things that you would like to do. Yes, if you like fairies, I am sure you know where to seek them.

I have been saying so much about story material that may be gathered in the country, that I am afraid my little readers, who do not live in the country, may think I have not given as much thought to them. There is just as much in the city, to furnish you with thought, as there is any-

where. The crowded streets. The lives of the boys and girls who live in the poorer sections. The great parks, where there are lakes, in which the boys can sail their boats in summer, and where they can skate in winter. All these, and thousands of other things, are food for thought.

I could give you a long list of subjects that you might tell stories about. I could make it almost an endless list, but I do not think that would be helping you in the right way.

What I have tried to do is to show you that there is material for stories everywhere, and to get you into the habit of looking for it, and knowing it when you see it.

Now, just a few words about preparing your minds for telling stories. Read! Read as many good children's stories as you can. Choose stories that you can understand. When father and mother are not busy with other things, they will be glad to read to you. You will have time enough to read grown up stories later, but, if you do not read the good children's stories, those we call the children's classics, now, you may never have the chance after you are grown up, and, even if you do, they will never have the same interest. Read them, and ask yourselves why you like them.

Mother will tell you what stories to read. She

read most of them when she was a little girl. She has probably read a great many of them to you already. I am sure she read you the Mother Goose rhymes long, long ago, and I think you have heard "Little Red Riding Hood," "The Three Bears," "Jack and the Bean Stalk," "Jack the Giant Killer," "Cinderella," "Puss in Boots," "The Sleeping Beauty," "Blue Beard," "Beauty and the Beast," "Alice In Wonderland," and "Anderson's Fairy Tales." Read "The Arabian Nights," and "Robinson Crusoe," and as many other good stories, old and new, as you can without taking the time that you know should be spent doing something else.

Has this chapter been a little long? Do you wonder why I have said so much about something that really isn't story telling? The reason I have made so much of this chapter is because I am so anxious that you should begin at once to fill your minds, or mental store-houses, just full of interesting thoughts. Then the story-telling part will not be difficult. The grammar and composition you are learning at school, will help you to build sentences and compose your thoughts. *I* have tried to help you with your *thoughts*. You might learn all the rules of grammar and composition, but, without the thoughts, you would not be able to tell stories.

There are a great many grown up girls and boys who go to art schools to learn to draw. They become able to draw very well, but their pictures are not interesting. It is because they have not learned to use the senses that should have been developed before they ever thought of learning to draw. They have no story to tell through their pictures. It is just so with your story-telling. You may learn to speak perfect English, but, unless you have something to say, no one will care to listen to your stories.

CHOOSING YOUR SUBJECT

There is no end to the number and variety of subjects that you have to choose from. You remember, we agreed that the difficulty is not so much finding a subject as it is choosing one. There are so very many interesting subjects, that it is only a matter of choice. You know pretty well, the kind of story that will be likely to interest your hearers, and you know what you like to talk about. Your story will be better if your subject is one that you understand and are interested in. Let these things be your first guides.

If, when you grow up, you write stories for the magazines or papers, you will find that in most cases, they want what they call seasonable stories. By "seasonable" stories, they mean stories that have to do with the season in which they are intended to be read. For example, during the summer months, they want stories about things that people are likely to be doing in the summer—out-door stories of boating and autoing and camping. In December they want Christmas stories and winter tales. The reason for this is that the reader's mind is in touch with the season he is living in.

When your thoughts are all on Christmas, and you are planning the jolly times you are going to have with the new sled or skates you hope to find under the tree Christmas morning —when you are longing for ice and beautiful drifts of snow, you do not care to listen to a story about the noise some little boy made on the Fourth of July. On the other hand, if you were planning to go to the lake for a picnic, on a nice summer day, it would not suit your mood to hear a story about a snow storm.

So, when little sister or brother are all excited wondering what Santa is going to put in their stocking, you can add to their happiness by telling them a Christmas story.

I do not mean to have you take this as a set rule for story telling. There are a great many cases where it would not hold at all. You might be waiting, in a hot, sunny place somewhere, and it would be a real relief to your little companions to listen to a story about a baby Eskimo, who lived in the far North, where there was always ice and snow. If your power of description was great enough, they would see the place you were telling about. They would feel the cold, crisp air, and you could make them forget how very warm and uncomfortable they were. Your

story would act like a nice drink of cool water on a hot day.

So you see, it would be quite wrong for us to make any hard, set rules about choosing subjects.

We are telling stories for play, and we do not want to make work of it. We are doing it to entertain others, and for our own amusement. But this does not mean that we cannot make our stories instructive. Stories that teach us some lesson—something historical—or something about nature, are often the most interesting, for the very reason that they are true. Many of the best story writers take a period in history, or some event that has really happened, and use it as their guide in building a story, just as you used the pictures as your guide. They keep to the historical facts, but they make up a story, or romance, out of their own imagination, and weave it in along with the history. Such a story is called a historical novel, or historical romance. Using a real time and place in history, makes the made up part of the story seem more real. And using imagination, and making up an exciting story, helps to make the history more interesting. So the real and the imaginative each help the other.

DELIVERY

You must remember that, as a story teller, you have another part to play besides what would be expected of you if you were simply writing your story. You have to tell it, and tell it in a way that will help to make it seem more real to your listeners. In other words, you should do a little bit of acting along with the telling. Your manner of delivery, which means, your way of telling, will have much to do with whether or not you are able to keep your hearers interested.

I am sure you remember the day you had your exercises at school, how you enjoyed hearing some of your classmates recite. How much they seemed to feel what they said. How they raised a hand here, or stamped a foot there, and how real it made their recitation seem. And you remember too, how hard it was to be interested, when some of the other children recited in a sing-song way, as though they were hurrying to have it over with and get back to their seats.

Do not be afraid to do a little acting. Imitate your different characters—the tone of their voices and their actions.

When Mother told the story of "Golden-locks

and the three bears," she lowered her voice to a tiny squeak when she said, " 'Who has eaten my porridge,' said the wee little bear." And how she made it sound sweet and motherly when she imitated the mother bear. And, when she talked like the big papa bear, her voice was so gruff that it fairly scared you. And yet, how you liked to have her do it, because it made the story seem so real.

When I was a very small boy, I went to a little country school, not far from the entrance to a national soldiers' home, as it was called. It was like a great park, with big comfortable buildings, and was kept up by the government, as a home for thousands of soldiers who had fought in the Civil War, and who were too old and feeble to take care of themselves.

We used to meet a great many of the old soldiers, in our walk to and from school, and as they had very little to occupy their time, they were always glad to find eager little children to listen to their stories. Of *course* their stories were *interesting*. They had real stories to tell. They were the men who had fought the great Civil War—and, could anything be more interesting than to hear a story of a battle from the lips of a man who had taken an active part in it? But, as I think back, the thing

that impressed me, even more than the stories, was their way of telling them. They must have felt, very keenly, what they were saying, for

some of them seemed to fairly live over again the things they told us. I remember one old man who had been a gunner in the artillery. His descriptions were very real. He would point to

the top of a distant hill, as he described the approach of the enemy. He would imitate the preparation to meet the charge, and would fairly

seem to be taking part in the struggle. It was very real to him. He was a good story teller. He must have been, to make a little boy remem-

ber his stories, and how he told them, for over thirty years.

Sometimes I think, how pleasant it would be,

to sit down under a tree, by that shady country road, and hear the same stories over again. I wonder if they would have the same thrill they carried long ago.

The old story tellers are gone, but their deeds and their stories will live as long as there are little children to read of them.

You have all been to motion picture plays. Perhaps we can find no better example to show how much can be expressed in action. You may sit for an hour or two and see a whole story acted

out, with not more than a very few words of explanation. I am speaking of this simply to impress on you, how much can be done in action and

expression. I do not mean that you must rely on these things altogether, but *do* remember that you can add a great deal to your story by the manner in which you tell it.

You will find that a very good way of keeping your little listeners interested is by imitating the tone and manner of speech of the different peo-

ple or characters in your story. This gives variety and helps to make them seem real. You know that the ugly ogre would not be likely to talk in the same tone as the gentle princess. So,

let the tone of your voice show the difference, just as you let your words express it.

I think we all like to have animals and birds and all living creatures given the power of speech. We know so well, from their actions, what they would say at times, that it is a great pleasure and relief to us, to say, for them, the things they would say if they could talk.

So, if you are telling a story about an old bear, or a wise old duck, or a funny little beetle, do not be afraid to say just what you think he would be likely to say, and say it in the very tone you think he would use. These things all help to add snap to your story, and to remove it from the commonplace.

There is a great deal of good to be gained from taking stories that you have heard or read, and telling them in your own way.

If you find it hard to build your own stories and tell them at the same time, it will be very good practice to use stories that have already been built and try to tell them in an interesting way. You may be surprised to see how much more you get out of the story yourself, by doing this.

When I was a little boy, I had a teacher who used to have us do two things. One of them was to memorize the different poems in our reader,

as we came to them. The other was to study each poem and then rewrite it in our own words. I have always felt indebted to this teacher. Sometimes you hear people say, "I do not care for poetry. Why should I take time to read it?" There are some things that we may not like, that are worth learning to like. I do not think my teacher felt that we should make a business of learning poetry by heart. I think he knew that we were at just the age where our minds would memorize easily, and that it was adding to our mental wealth, to have some good verses stored away in our memories. It is like knowing some nice songs.

His practice of having us write the poems, in prose, in our own way, was to help us to get the thought that was in them, and I think it was a very good way.

You like verses. I am sure you do. Little children who like to tell stories are pretty apt to like poems. The next time brother or sister ask you to tell them a story, take some little poem that you are fond of and see how well you can tell it in your own words. Try some of Robert Stevenson's poems in "A Child's Garden of Verses," and see what beautiful little stories he tells in them.

ORIGINALITY

We have talked about using our eyes and ears, and about how to gather material—How to choose a subject, and how to build a story. We have talked about plots, and about delivery.

There is one thing that we have said very little about. That is, originality. We can talk about what originality is, but it would be hard for me to help your originality by giving you any rules or methods to follow. Hard, for the reason that, in trying to help you, I might take away something that you already had.

Your own way of thinking, and the thoughts your mind invents, is what is called your originality. It is your own, just as much as the color of your hair, or the shape of your nose is your own. The way your mind builds, with the material that it has to work with, is a gift that is yours alone. It is the thing that makes your story different from any one's else story, even though you may be talking about the same thing.

No two minds can think exactly alike, any more than two people can look exactly alike. The difference in your way of reasoning from any one's else way is your originality. It cannot be given to you, for the reason that it is

yours to begin with, and no one else has it to give. It *can* be developed by you though. It can be developed by exercising your senses—your sight and hearing and touch and taste and smell. The senses feed your thoughts, and develop your originality.

If I were to say more about originality, I would only be repeating the things we have already talked about.

Your originality must grow and develop through the use of your senses.

STYLE

Style, in story telling, is your manner or way of expressing yourself and telling what you have to say.

We have talked about originality of thought, or originality in thinking up your stories. Style, is originality in your way of telling stories.

When you are a little older and do a great deal of reading, your mind will become so trained that, in many cases, you will be able to tell by reading a story or poem, who its author is. This is not because a writer's stories are all alike. It is because you become acquainted with his way of telling stories. You get to know his manner of expression. In other words, you know his style.

Style has a very important part in good story telling, and is therefore a subject that you should give much thought to.

Your choice of words—choosing the most expressive words; your manner of expression; your way of unfolding your plot, all go to make up what we call your style.

Make a study of your choice of words. The slight difference in words that mean almost the

same thing, is a matter that should be given careful study. Be careful not to use words that are too extreme for the thought you wish to express. Such words as "terrible" and "frightful" and "horrible," should be used sparingly, and in their correct place.

Study different ways of expressing yourself so that, if you have to repeat a thought you can present the same idea in different words. This will help to give variety to what you are saying.

Because a certain expression is effective, or, is good, you must be careful not to use it too freely, or it will lose its force.

You may find that you can arouse special interest among your listeners by saying, "And then, what do you suppose happened?" Or, "Suddenly, what do you think he did?" They like it because it is an appeal to their own thought or imagination, but you must be careful not to do this too often or it will have no effect.

Try not to repeat, excepting when you do it to make a thought more impressive.

Do not try to tell your story in grown-up language, or the way you think some older person would tell it. It is your own story, so tell it in *your* way. Remember that simple expression is always best.

A LAST WORD

And now, a last word to all my little story telling friends. Do not neglect your arithmetic, or your geography, or your history, or any other study—but particularly, because you like to tell stories, *do* pay special attention to your rhetoric and language. Don't think that they are dry and uninteresting. They are the tools that are to help you carve your stories, and you want them to be sharp and useful.

THE END

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